Method 1 – For the Table-Challenged
By James Hober

Are you table-challenged? Not thrilled about looking up Chronological Voice Formulas (such as ABST) in the Master Formula Table? I don't know that there's a way around it completely. After all, we're talking about categorizing 2,408 four-note chords. That's 43 qualities times 14 voicing groups times 4 systematic inversions. And that 2,408 doesn't even include homonyms, transpositions, or string transfers. So it's actually amazing that such a small table, the Master Formula Table, can be used to determine which voicing group a given chord belongs in.

Nevertheless, there are some memory tricks that can save you from table lookup. First, notice that some of the Chronological Voice Formulas spell words, like TABS, STAB and BATS. Second, realize that you can come up with cute mnemonics, like "**B**etter **S**top **T**o **A**sk" for BSTA. These two things can make remembering a particular Chronological Voice Formula easier.

Besides remembering a particular Chronological Voice Formula, you'll have to associate it with the correct voicing group. Maybe you can just remember that TABS is V-2. Or maybe you'll have to think up an association.

Here are some funny and not-so-funny ways to remember and associate a few Chronological Voice Formulas with their voicing group:

V-1 BTAS — the natural order.   Ted called this "bottom up" order because you look at the voices from lowest sounding to highest. It's pretty easy to remember that a root position V-1 maj7 chord will have root, 3rd, 5th, 7th in BTAS respectively.

By the way, Ted also viewed V-1 chords "top down." I hesitate to mention this because it means you are walking the Chord Tone Path backwards. And that can be confusing. But with V-1s, it's not that hard to see that you could view a root position V-1 maj7 from the soprano to the bass: 7th, 5th, 3rd, root.

V-2 STAB — touché (<u>two</u>-shay). The "two" helps you associate with V-2, too. Too true.

V-3 TSAB — **T**he **S**tooges **A**re **B**oneheaded. How many stooges are there? Hence the connection to this voicing group. "Oh, a wise guy. Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk."

V-4 ASTB — **A**be's **S**peech **T**o **B**attlers ("Four score and seven years ago…"). Okay, maybe President Lincoln was speaking to the general citizenry gathered at Gettysburg and not just the soldiers. Anyway, I got my "four" connection in there.

V-5 BATS — Bats have the same <u>five</u> senses that humans do, although their hearing includes echolocation using sonar.

V-8 SATB — the reverse natural order, "by luck," according to Ted's notes. I believe he meant that the V-1 order was intentional but the reverse, V-8 order happened more by chance. Anyway, I need a V8. (Is that a natural or an unnatural drink?)

If you like this kind of thing, I'm sure you can come up with some yourself.

Once you remember one Chronological Voice Formula for a voicing group, you can derive the other three by rotation. So if you remember BATS for V-5, you can rotate it, that is, move the last letter around to the front, and get SBAT, TSBA, and ATSB.

You certainly don't need to do the memorization/association described above. It's mostly for fun. You can always look things up in the table. But when you don't have the Master Formula Table handy, a few memory tricks can save the day and help you determine a chord's voicing group.

—James